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THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 March 1999]

GE.99-11543 (E)

Development and human rights

1. UNDP, in its "Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Development - a UNDP Policy Document", quotes the United Nations Working Group on the Right to Development as follows: (the right to development is) "multidimensional, integrated, dynamic and progressive. Its realization involves the full observation of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. (...) Realization of the Right to development is the responsibility of all actors in development, within the international community, within States at both the national and international levels, within the agencies of the United Nations system". UNDP goes on to note that "a fundamental human freedom is the freedom from want. Poverty is a human rights violation and freedom from poverty is an integral and inalienable human right."

2. There are different viewpoints on poverty in various civilizations, cultures and religions. Islam considers poverty as a basic and, at the same time, an unacceptable phenomenon and has issued certain prescriptions concerning poverty. Although the Islamic States are not categorized as developed countries, it should not be assumed that Islam regards poverty as a positive phenomenon. As a matter of fact, Islam severely condemns all forms of poverty, both moral and material, and considers its existence to be a destructive factor for the society and human values. Furthermore Islam, seeing poverty as a phenomenon in opposition to religion, provides certain mechanisms for the elimination of poverty to such an extent that it can be said that Islam has planned its development strategies on the basis of eliminating poverty in human societies.

3. The existence of poverty in human societies causes certain fundamental obstacles in the way of the poor societies in realizing their rights. The expansion of poverty leads to efforts to satisfy solely the primary needs and efforts to realize the other basic rights of mankind are being ignored. Rights such as the right to life, the right to freedom of expression and thought, the right to self-determination and other important and fundamental rights become of vital importance once the members of the societies no longer have to be concerned with their shelter, food and clothing needs. In such societies, the Governments consider meeting the primary needs of their nationals as their main task and, as an unfortunate result, has always been used as an excuse for dictatorial Governments to violate their nationals' basic human rights.

4. Poverty and sustainable livelihoods are closely linked to human rights. Indeed, poverty is a violation of human rights. As UNDP stated in its policy document, poverty and inequality can undermine human rights by fuelling social unrest and violence and increasing the precariousness of social, economic and political rights.

5. Among the different viewpoints on the right to development, two viewpoints are more important. The first viewpoint belongs to those who believe that the right to development can be regarded as an excuse for some States to exercise pressure on other States. The second point of view is of those who believe that raising the issue of the right to development for those autocratic States can justify their ignoring human rights violations within their territories.

6. Although there is a lot to say on poverty as an ominous and threatening phenomenon at the international level, what is of great importance is an understanding of the current situation. This point should be taken into consideration: that protecting the basic and fundamental rights requires the establishment of civil society institutions and that the establishment of such institutions cannot be realized without the promotion of people's knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to think about appropriate mechanisms for the promotion of people's knowledge in different societies, mechanisms planned in line with educational goals and providing for the primary needs of human societies. To this end, the role of the NGOs in planning and executing both local and national programmes is of vital importance and the allocation of technical and financial support for the educational and cultural activities of these NGOs is requested.